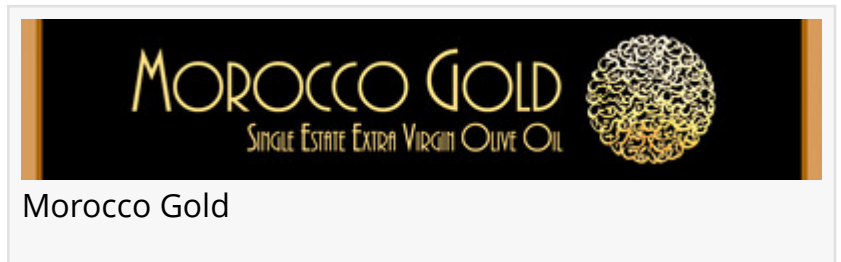


Olive Oil Fraud Exposed as Leading Brands Fail to Meet Standards

Supermarket shelves filled with so-called 'extra virgin' olive oils may not be what they seem, as investigations reveal widespread mislabelling and fraud.



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Standing in the supermarket aisle, it's hard to ignore the rows of bottles promising the finest "extra virgin" olive oil – with premium labels from Italy, Spain, and beyond. However, according to recent investigations, many of these oils do not live up to their name, leaving UK consumers unknowingly paying top prices for substandard products.

What Does 'Extra Virgin' Really Mean?

[Genuine extra virgin olive oil](#) (EVOO) is the highest quality available. It's extracted from the first cold pressing of olives, without using heat or chemicals. It must meet strict chemical and sensory standards, including a fresh, fruity aroma and peppery bite – and it should be completely free from defects such as rancidity or mustiness.

Yet despite the rigorous definition, many oils found on British shelves labelled as "extra virgin" have failed to meet official standards. Some are diluted with cheaper refined oils or even substituted with non-olive oils such as sunflower or soybean.

Fraud Exposed: A Global Issue

Over the past few years, several high-profile investigations have exposed the depth of deception in the olive oil trade. In Italy, authorities have seized vast quantities of counterfeit oil. Spain, Greece, and the United States have reported similar incidents.

One alarming UK food standards investigation found that up to [70% of extra virgin olive oils on sale failed](#) to meet the expected benchmarks. In some cases, bottles contained undisclosed blends, while others were found to have deteriorated due to poor storage and transport, severely compromising their quality and flavour.

With [authentic extra virgin olive oil](#) fetching a high price on the global market, especially from traditional growing regions, unscrupulous producers have quickly exploited the lucrative opportunity—at the expense of unsuspecting shoppers.

How to Protect Yourself When Buying Olive Oil

Spotting a fake isn't always straightforward, but several tips can help consumers make informed choices:

1. Look for a Harvest Date

Freshness matters. Choose oils with a clear harvest date and aim to use them within 12–18 months of that time. Avoid relying solely on “best before” dates.

2. Seek Certified Labels

Quality designations such as PDO (Protected Designation of Origin) or PGI (Protected Geographical Indication) indicate that the oil comes from a specific region and meets rigorous standards. While not foolproof, they add a layer of credibility.

3. Beware of Bargains

Producing high-quality olive oil isn't cheap. If a product seems suspiciously low-priced but claims to be extra virgin, it may not be genuine.

4. Avoid Clear Bottles

Exposure to light can degrade oil quality. Opt for oils sold in dark glass bottles or tins, as these offer better protection.

5. Trust Your Taste

A real extra virgin olive oil should taste fruity, slightly bitter, and peppery. If it tastes greasy, flat, or has a musty odour, it's likely not the real deal.

Why It Matters

Some might question whether the distinction really matters. The answer is a resounding yes. Fake or low-quality oils deceive consumers financially and lack the health benefits associated with true extra virgin olive oil. These include powerful antioxidants, anti-inflammatory properties, and a unique flavour profile that enhances food and promotes well-being.

The Industry Fightback

There is hope on the horizon. Governments and food safety agencies are strengthening efforts to regulate the olive oil industry more stringently. Advances in testing technology now allow for faster, more accurate quality checks. But until stricter standards and enforcement become widespread, consumer knowledge remains a vital line of defence.

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